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Twenty Years After Dayton: Bosnia-Herzegovina (Still) Stable and Explosive*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how fragile Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is and whether it is indeed in danger of collapsing, as significant amount of academic literature often claims. The research finds that BiH is not in an immediate danger of collapse. BiH remains peaceful, despite the numerous challenges it faces. However, it comprises an alarming amount of causes of conflict that have been mitigated because both international actors and local elites benefit from the current status quo. Thus, BiH finds itself in a peaceful stalemate, which is likely to continue until a structural change occurs that triggers the outbreak of violent conflict.

Introduction

Scenarios for collapse of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH henceforth) have come and gone for the last 10 years. Belloni mentioned in 2009 that from roughly 2006 onwards, Bosnia had found itself in a deep political crisis (Belloni 2009). At that time also Holbrooke, Ashdown, McMahon and Western all maintained that the country was in real danger of collapse as Bosnians were talking about the potential outbreak of war (Ashdown and Holbrooke 2008, McMahon and Western 2009). The situation did not seem to improve in the following years. In 2010, speculations about the outbreak of conflict and potential disintegration of the country featured on international headlines (Bieber 2010). Kappler and Richmond (2011) thought that BiH was in the middle of its most serious constitutional crisis since the Bosnian War of the 1990s, while in subsequent years, the country was repeatedly shaken by a series of demonstrations, most notably the 'Picin park' demonstration of 2012, the 'baby revolution' of 2013 and the February demonstrations of 2014¹ (Gilbert and Mujanović 2015, Kurtović 2015). Even the European Union (EU) Progress Report on Enlargement, usually

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expressed in a positive tone, wrote that the protests in early 2014 underlined the fragility of the socio-economic situation, stressing also the country's shortcomings, among others, in building functional state institutions, reforming the economy and the judiciary and combating corruption (European Commission 2014).

On the other hand, there are researchers who claim those scenarios of a new conflict are exaggerated. Bieber (2010) asserted that BiH is no closer to the brink of war than it has been many times since the end of violence in 1995 and assured that a conflict was not on the horizon. In a similar vein, Milosevic (2008) argued that BiH was neither 'in real danger of collapse', nor close to 'another crisis'. BiH, he claimed, is at peace and all its citizens travel freely throughout the country, and they have the same aspirations as their neighbours in Western Europe, i.e., 'to make a better life for themselves and their children'. Moreover, although the World Bank report of 2014 showed only reserved optimism (WB 2015), the following year's report stated that economic growth performed better than expected, with the country to start making progress in key areas of the economic sector (WB 2016).

This paper takes a closer look at Bosnia and Herzegovina and seeks to answer the question of how fragile the country is and whether it is indeed in danger of collapse. In order to do that, the study reviews the literature of the causes of intra-state conflict and compares it with the situation in BiH. This way the research seeks to find out whether and which of the predominantly cited causes of intra-state conflict can be found in BiH and to what extent their existence threatens peace in the country. Although there are numerous studies on BiH examining different aspects of the challenges the country faces (*inter alia*, Divjak and Pugh 2008, Clark 2009, Toal and Maksić 2011), this article is, to the author's knowledge, the first systematic review of theories of conflict and their application to this case. Therefore, the originality of this paper lies in the systematic juxtaposition of theory of ethnic conflict with empirical evidence on the ground in order to reach a conclusion on whether BiH is as fragile as significant amount of academic literature claims.

The paper is structured as follows. First, it reflects upon and defines the main concepts of the paper, i.e., fragility, peace and intra-state conflict. This prepares the ground for the review of the literature on the causes of intra-state conflict. Then the study continues with the case study. Based on elite interviews, academic literature, investigative reporting and official statements the paper offers a presentation of the political, social and economic climate in BiH² taking into consideration both stabilising and de-stabilising factors. Finally the paper concludes with a cross-sectional analysis of theory and empirical evidence that leads to the answer of the research question.

Defining Fragility, Peace and Conflict

All three terms have been much debated in the academic literature with no consensus reached on an exact definition. The terms are fluid and changing according to history and context in which they are applied. Thus, their meaning and use are a matter of subjective understanding and interpretation.

State fragility has been associated with various combinations of the following dysfunctions: inability to provide basic services and meet vital needs, unstable and weak governance, a persistent condition of extreme poverty, lack of territorial control and high propensity to conflict and civil war (Bertocchi and Guerzoni 2012, p. 769). The Fragile State Index defines fragility according to levels of stability and proneness to conflict (FFP 2015). Furthermore, Brown and Stewart (2010) define as fragile states countries that are failing, or at risk of failing, with respect to authority (where the state lacks the authority to protect its citizens from violence), comprehensive basic service provision (where the state fails to ensure that all citizens have access to basic services), or legitimacy (where the state enjoys only limited support among its people). In addition to those concepts of fragility, there are the donors' definitions of fragility understanding it as inability of recipient country to use aid inflows to achieve economic growth and poverty reduction (Browne 2007, Balamoune-Lutz and McGillivray 2011).

This paper uses a minimalistic definition of fragility focusing on the security aspect of it. In particular, this paper refers to the degree to which a country is prone to intra-state conflict. In this context, a fragile state is different than a failed state³ or a state already in conflict. Fragile state is defined as a state in a delicate situation that dangerously tiptoes on a thin line between peace and conflict. The reason why this paper uses such a minimalistic definition is that the scope of the article is limited to examine the sustainability of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a structure. The use of a more elaborated definition of fragility would be useful in addressing questions related to specific functions of BiH. For example, the definition of Brown and Stewart (2010) would be appropriate to answer questions related to BiH's performance in terms of the ability to protect the physical safety of its citizens or for the evaluation of the extent to which the state is in place to provide basic services. These specific aspects of state function cumulatively affect the degree to which a state is fragile or not. The adoption of a detailed definition, though, would focus on specific aspects of fragility, rather than allow for an assessment of the situation as a whole. The use of a minimalistic definition, ironically, allows for a more holistic consideration of elements that constitute the structure fragile or stable.

Peace is another term, which is difficult to define. In a broad categorisation, peace can be classified either as positive or negative. Positive peace is defined by the attitudes, institutions and structures which create and sustain peaceful societies (GPI 2015). In a post-conflict context, positive peace starts with reconciliation and rapprochement of parties previously in conflict (Clark 2009)

and continues with development of cooperation, promotion of equality and fostering of a culture of peace and dialogue (Galtung and Fischer 2013). Thus, positive peace is an ambitious approach towards peace and looks at the presence of elements that render a state not merely functional, but also flourishing. Negative peace, on the other hand, is broadly understood as the absence of war (Roberts 2008). In contrast to positive peace that counts the presence of various elements, negative peace rather counts absences, and in particular, the absence of violence.

This paper will adopt a minimalistic approach for this notion as well, defining as peaceful a country where violent conflict is absent. This approach is in accordance with the definitions of fragility and conflict this research adopted. The scope of this article is to evaluate to what extent BiH is in danger of collapse. The fragility of the country and, thus its position in a state of negative peace is quite predicable. However, the turning point in the country's situation and this of its citizens would be the outbreak of a violent conflict. Thus, BiH for this paper is currently at peace, although it lacks to a large extent, as will be shown later, functional institutions, legitimacy and a culture of dialogue, while reconciliation and co-operation between former belligerent parties is still at an early stage to say the least.

This study will use the terms ethnic conflict, civil and intra-state conflict interchangeably. In an ethnic conflict the goals of at least one of the parties are defined in ethnic terms, making the primary fault line of confrontation one of ethnic distinctions (Wolff 2006). This, however, does not mean that ethnic conflicts are solely about ethnicity. Rather ethnicity may provide, along with other reasons, the mobilisation basis for conflict to erupt (Cordell and Wolff 2009). Civil and intra-state conflicts are even broader notions that may incorporate causes of war that are unrelated to ethnicity, while especially the term intra-state focuses on the territorial dimension of the conflict, i.e., that the violence takes place within the borders of a state. This paper will use those terms as well in order to investigate other reasons of conflict that may be found in BiH and provide motives for mobilisation of conflict unrelated to ethnicity. Moreover, the fact that this research defines a potential conflict in BiH as intra-state does not mean that it ignores regional and international elements that may contribute to an outbreak of violence. Nonetheless, the conflict is perceived as intra-state, as this study examines BiH as the core 'theatre' of a potential conflict.

Finally, the research draws on the literature of the causes of intra-state war, in general, rather than literature of intra-state war recurrence, in particular, for two main reasons. First, even if a conflict takes place in the country this will be much more than twenty years after the end of the Yugoslav wars. This exceeds the time frame of analysis studies on recurrence usually use, which is a period of five to ten years from the end of civil war until its resumption (Quinn *et al.* 2007, Suhrke and Samset 2007).⁴ Second, it is acknowledged that many of the causes of conflict that can be found in BiH stem from the previous wars. Nevertheless,

new causes for war have also emerged out of the settlements that were supposed to bring peace and stability in the country. These have created an environment that, although it has its origins in a previous conflict, it has evolved over time and has created new reasons of conflict, different than the ones that led to war twenty-five years ago. As a result, this paper will use Call's classification 'new civil war in same country or territory' (Call 2012, p. 14) and will accordingly examine the potential causes of conflict. The paper continues with a review of the literature of intra-state conflict and its application on the case study.

Causes of Intra-state Conflict

The literature of intra-state conflict identifies various causes of violent conflict that could be summarised in broad themes. To begin with, causes based on identity issues, including identity-driven discrimination and marginalisation of political, economic and social affairs of a state, hold a prominent position in the literature of intra-state conflict (Gurr 1993, Hegre and Sambanis 2006, Yilmaz 2007, Regan 2009, Stewart 2010). Along with identity, intra-state conflicts are correlated with, but not limited to, anti-democratic systems of governance, corruption, poverty and unequal distribution of resources, often connected with a history of decolonisation and inadequate state mechanisms (Van Evera 1994, Wimmer 1997, Rwantabagu 2001, Mengisteab 2003, Cunningham and Lemke 2013).

Identity and Political Grievances as Causes of Intra-state Conflict

The presence of ethnic, cultural and religious differences in a wide number of cases of intra-state conflict has prompted scholars to investigate their role as a cause of internal violent conflict. Indeed, identity and ethnicity feature as one of the causes of ethnic conflict in numerous studies. However, they are not the only driving force behind the conflict. Ethnic differentiation or identity grievances are not enough reason to activate a conflict. Numerous multi-ethnic societies are not only at peace, but they prosper. Thus, the mere existence of identity grievances, does not lead to conflict; particular sets of conditions need to take place in order for a conflict to erupt (Udovički and Ridgeway 2000).

These conditions are certainly different according to case and context. Blagojevic (2009), for example, suggests that ethnic conflict occurs when the following factors and conditions converge: a major structural crisis; presence of historical memories of inter-ethnic grievances; institutional factors that promote ethnic intolerance; manipulation of historical memories by political entrepreneurs to evoke emotions such as fear, resentment, and hate towards the 'other'; and an inter-ethnic competition over resources and rights. She claims also that when a sudden structural change upsets previous political and institutional arrangements, this creates a context of instability and uncertainty that facilitates

a manifestation of emotional antagonisms among ethnic groups. Political entrepreneurs, in their quest for power, mobilise ethnic constituencies by promoting inter-ethnic animosities using the rhetorical weapons of blame, fear, and hate, resulting in an inter-ethnic competition over resources and rights until a violent conflict erupts.

Focusing more on the impact of political grievances to the outbreak of ethnic conflict Gurr (1993) and Gurr and Moore (1997) contend that protest and rebellion by communal groups are jointly motivated by deep-seated grievances about group status and by pursuit of political interests, as formulated by group leaders and political entrepreneurs. Theuerkauf (2010) also stresses the effects of political grievances on the outbreak of conflict. She claims the systematic exclusion of certain ethnic groups from decisionmaking processes, gives rise to emotions of anger and resentment among them, turning violent actions into a way of making themselves heard. In addition, the lack of a voice over various political and economic issues exacerbates feelings of insecurity, potentially leading to a security dilemma, which as will be discussed later is one of the most widely accepted causes of conflict.

Furthermore, the role of democracy and the destructive implications its lack may have, have been a recurrent theme in the literature of ethnic conflict. Udovički and Ridgeway (2000), explaining the causes of the destruction of Yugoslavia, present the socialist past and the absence of liberal political traditions as main reasons behind the outbreak of the Yugoslav wars. Besides, Udovički and Ridgeway (2000) reject the notion that the Yugoslav wars were caused by deep-rooted ethnic hatred. They argue that the leadership vacuum after the death of Tito, a deep economic crisis, the absence of liberal political traditions and the end of the Cold War created a set of sociopolitical circumstances that led to the outbreak of conflict. This view is also shared by Gagnon (2004), who stresses that in such a context elites were able to use violence to create particular notions of identity that did not exist before. Thus, he demonstrates that it was not ethnicity that was used in order to trigger violence. On the contrary, violence was used to fuel ethnicity, ethnicise territory, reconstruct the political space and polarise and divide the society.

Finally, Yilmaz (2007) argues that the main causes of intra-state wars are to be found in identity-based discrimination, combined with illiberal political regimes, unequal distribution of natural wealth and unresolved past traumas, while Rwantabagu (2001) and Mengisteab (2003) attribute specific emphasis on unstable and illegitimate state structures as principal causes of intra-state conflict. Similar arguments can be found in the work of Posen (1993) and Van Evera (1994) identifying weak state structures as the starting point of internal conflicts. This leads to a lack of accountability that allows leaders to engage in gross corruption, the implications of which will be analysed in more detail in the following section. Lack of accountability, however, also allows leaders behave as if they owned the state and to use it for their own purposes. This way the state is

detached from the society, loses legitimacy in the eyes of the local population creating permissive conditions for conflict to erupt.

Economic Inequality and Corruption

Unequal distribution of wealth and poverty can constitute possible causes of internal conflict, when coinciding with identity grievances. Evans (1994), for instance, suggests that although ethnic and religious differences are not themselves causes of conflict, they may become so through a downward spiral of economic decline, combined with failing political institutions. In such cases, he claims, ethnic and religious differences in combination with long deteriorating economic situation may be exploited by unscrupulous political leaders leading to the rise of demagogic politics and the intensification of chauvinistic myth making, adding up grievances and enhancing hostility between different groups until eventually war breaks out.

In addition, empirical evidence from various case studies demonstrate that poorer countries are at a higher risk of experiencing civil war (Fearon and Laitin 2003, Do and Iyer 2010). Although few would assert that poverty per se, causes conflict, poverty can be a source of grievance which is used by leaders to mobilise followers and legitimate violent actions. Poverty, therefore, can fuel conflict 'from below' (Keen 1998).

Corruption is also a characteristic found to be positively associated with ethnic conflict for a variety of reasons. Economic grievances can result from the negative impact of corruption on investment, government expenditure on education and economic growth (Mauro 1995, 1998). Furthermore, in corrupt public institutions, government (and other) officials may use their authority for private gains, enriching themselves as well as those close to them. Thus, the benefits from corruption are likely to accrue to the better-connected individuals in society, who belong mostly to high-income groups. This way corruption would affect not only investment and growth but also income distribution, leading to a deepening of inequalities within the society (Gupta *et al.* 1998).

By increasing grievances, corruption creates political instability through popular support for political change (McMullan 1961, Le Billon 2003). The would-be rulers can accuse rulers of corruption and benefit from popular support to precipitate rapid political change through violence. Neudorfer and Theuerkauf (2014) find that corruption increases the risk of large-scale ethnic violence, because it distorts the political decisionmaking process, leading to a deepening of political and economic inequalities between different ethnic groups.

Moreover, corruption increases feelings of discrimination and lack of legitimacy adding to the potential of political instability. Corruption, being characterised by nepotism, favouritism and clientism results in a lack of transparency that exacerbates perceptions of unfairness. In addition, in nominally democratic regimes, high levels of corruption undermine the democratic function of state

institutions. The state as structure, namely a source of credibility and security, loses legitimacy and citizens turn to individual agents for their needs. The political stability is undermined with the state being alienated from the society. Therefore, corruption exacerbates the majority of the aforementioned causes of ethnic conflict, by enhancing grievances, deepening inequalities, weakening democracy and causing the state lose legitimacy.

Entering Security Dilemma

Weak state institutions, corruption, poverty and inequalities, enhance inter-group grievances and create the stage for political opportunists to act. This, in turn, may lead to a security dilemma, which increases the likelihood of conflict. In a security dilemma, no community can provide for its security without threatening the security of others, i.e., what one group does to enhance its security may decrease the security of another group (Kaufmann 2007). If the latter group feels threatened, it tends to react to provide for its own security in ways that decrease the security of the first group (Rose 2000). These interactions combined create a vicious cycle that threatens to pull multi-ethnic societies into violence. The security dilemma explanation, while it has not gone unchallenged (Jenne 2012), is one of the most commonly accepted causal mechanisms that links grievances to conflict onset (Horowitz 1985, Posen 1993, Kaufmann 1996, Lake and Rothchild 1996, Roe 1999, Kaufman 2001), making mutual distrust between groups one of the most problematic psychological elements of any conflict situation (Fearon and Laitin 2008).

External Factors

Apart from the causes that can be found internally in the state, there are also external triggers of ethnic conflict (Brown 2001). Examining the context of Yugoslavia, Woodward (2000) and Glaurdić (2011) show that international factors, along with nationalism, the rise of nationalist leaders to power and deterioration in economic conditions led to the outbreak and intensification of violent conflict. Focusing on the international aspect of their argument, Woodward (2000) and Glaurdić (2011) explain how upon the end of the Cold War Yugoslavia lost its strategic importance for the US. This directly affected events in the country by leaving Europe to handle the imminent wars. The -at that time- European Community (EC), though, possessed neither the experience nor adequate conflict management mechanisms (Kartsonaki 2016). The actions of the EC were divided, with each member state promoting actions that furthered individual interests. Overall, however, the West seeking to stabilise the region continued to support and engage with the nationalist governments in Croatia and Serbia. According to Glaurdić (2011) this demonstrated tolerance towards the violence they conducted, encouraging expansionist policies in BiH.

Besides, the impact of regional factors on the causes of internal conflicts has often been mentioned in the literature (Judah 2000, Sambanis 2001, Salehyan 2007, Kubo 2010). Sambanis (2001) presents statistical evidence that neighbourhood wars or contrariwise long periods of peace seem to have a significant impact on the onset of ethnic war in particular. In the same vain, both Gurr (1993) and Yilmaz (2007) argue that ethnic mobilisation is prompted by the occurrence of ethnopolitical conflict elsewhere through the processes of diffusion and contagion.⁵ Furthermore, political activists in one country can obtain sanctuary and support from their transnational kindred, affecting the balance of power and motivation within the country in question (Salehyan 2007, Cederman *et al.* 2009). Thus, the external intervention and the level and kind of external assistance combined with the occurrence of similar rebellions in the region constitute significant causes of intra-state wars (Rwantabagu 2001).

Combining the Reasons of Intra-state Conflict

The causes of intra-state conflict are numerous and interrelated. Although none of the aforementioned factors is alone sufficient to lead to the outbreak of ethnic conflict, if a combination of causes occurs then a violent conflict may erupt (Jalali and Lipset 1992). This agrees with Brown's (2001) analysis of 'underlying' and 'proximate' causes of conflict. Underlying causes refer to those conditions that make a country prone to violence, including the aforementioned ethnic, structural, political, economic and regional factors. Nonetheless, the mere existence of the above elements does not necessarily mean that a society will be led to violence; on the contrary, conflict is rather a rare event (Fearon and Laitin 1996). For an intra-state conflict to break out a rapid change or a series of cumulative changes need to occur that would turn those underlying causes into direct (or proximate) causes of war (Brown 2001). In other words, there are dormant causes of conflict that are activated through rapid changes, such as collapse of the political system or a change in intra-state military balance. Nonetheless, instead of being rapid, these changes can also be slow, but constantly adding up. For instance, growing inter-group competitions, mounting economic problems, ethnic bashing and propagandising can eventually lead to a point where de-escalation is extremely difficult and conflict almost impossible to escape.

This paper will show in the following section that BiH presents a significant number of underlying causes of ethnic conflict. Political grievances are increasing through institutions that do not allow inclusive representation of the population. Contrariwise, the way of function of this largely decentralised state promotes ethnic division that also adds to grievances. Through nationalist propaganda found in most layers of societal functions past traumas are not only not addressed, but also exacerbated impeding reconciliation between the different ethnic communities. Economic inequalities within the society are huge, sustained and augmented through corrupt institutions and processes.

Rhetoric for carrying out a secessionist referendum in Republika Srpska (one of the two constituent entities of BiH) fuels ethnic tension. The actual conduct of the referendum, however, would in most likelihood provide the rapid change that could serve as trigger for conflict to break out. A secessionist referendum would probably activate a security dilemma, where the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) would proceed to pre-emptive actions that would lead in turn to conflict. Similarly, events in the neighbourhood could provide another trigger for violence to erupt. BiH survived Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence, but problems both in Kosovo and in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) are mounting. Three states⁶ with such fragile institutions and unstable political climate in such close geographical proximity with one another turn the western Balkans into a boiling cauldron.

The following section will analyse the situation in BiH and demonstrate in more detail the existing underlying causes of conflict. It will also present potential triggers of conflict. Finally, it will also mention some stabilising factors that enable the maintenance of (negative) peace, despite the plethora of causes for conflict.

Present Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Twenty years after the signing of the Dayton Peace Accord, the agreement that put an end to the civil war that raged from 1992 to 1995, BiH still finds itself in a dire political, social and economic deadlock. Its political institutions are dysfunctional, economic growth remains limited, investments and nearly any potential for development and improvement is at the mercy of a handful of speculators. Social cohesion and inter-ethnic reconciliation are also victims of propaganda and political opportunism (Ker-Lindsay 2016). However, does this situation threaten peace? Does BiH demonstrate a combination of factors that could actually lead to conflict?

The Legacy of Dayton: Freezing the War

The agreement at Dayton practically created the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina in its present form, transforming it from a former Yugoslav republic into an independent country. The Dayton accords, therefore, constituted the blueprint of how to run this newly established, war-torn state, providing detailed arrangements on participation and representation of the three ethnic groups – Serbs, Muslims, Croats – in state institutions, instructions on how to manage those institutions as well as a constitution that is still valid today (Dayton Agreement 1995).

Dayton succeeded in transferring the conflict from the military to the political realm (Belloni 2009). However, this proved to be both a blessing and a curse for BiH. It certainly helped maintain peace; at least a negative peace. This is

definitely a success considering the level of violence and the atrocities committed during the conflict. Nonetheless, the Dayton accords, and the constitution it included, arose out of a war without a clear military victor among the three ethnic groups, and perhaps without even all belligerent parties to be ready to compromise. In addition, the agreement seemed to deny to all parties what they had tried to achieve during the war (Weller and Wolff 2006). The Bosnian Muslim (Bosniak henceforth) side had been forced to settle at a time when they were finally gaining ground militarily, while Bosnian Serbs were denied unification with Serbia (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia at that time). They achieved, nevertheless, to largely maintain the lands they have gained during the war through the legitimisation of Republika Srpska (RS), by turning the latter into one of the two constitutional entities of BiH. Bosnian Croats, in contrast, were denied both annexation with Croatia and a Republika Srpska-like entity within BiH. Instead, they were tied with Bosniaks into an awkward political settlement, forming the other constitutional entity of the state, the FBiH. By leaving all sides dissatisfied with the arrangements and by transferring the conflict onto the political stage, the state has been held hostage of unfulfilled war time ethnic aspirations for more than twenty years.

The Vicious Circle of Ethnic and Political Grievances

The peace settlements then along with bringing peace they also prevented political progress by legitimising and entrenching the status quo of division along ethnic lines, enabling the conflicting parties to continue their wartime agenda by other means. The arrangements guaranteed equal representation of the three ethnic groups in nearly all, if not all, decisionmaking processes. The constitution, Annex 4 of the Dayton accords, foresaw the equal representation of the three ethnic groups in all governmental procedures including the parliamentary assembly and the presidency, the constitutional court and the central bank of BiH (Dayton Agreement 1995). This may have been necessary to end the war as it ensured power-sharing among the three ethnic groups, guaranteeing also that no ethnic group would be overpowered by the others (Szewczyk 2010). Perhaps this was the only option at that time that would end violence. However, it also sowed the seeds of instability by creating an extensively decentralised political system, based on ethnicity and maintained by nationalist rhetoric undermining the state's authority (McMahon and Western 2009).

The power-sharing arrangements of Dayton have immobilised the country's decisionmaking process. The vast majority of institutions in BiH have to comprise the following composition of members: two thirds from the FBiH (out of which one third from the Croat and one third from the Muslim community) and one third Serbs from the RS. In the end, all three constituent ethnicities will have the same number of representatives in each institution. In the parliamentary assembly the decisions are taken by majority of those present, while preferably the

majority should include at least one-third of the votes from the territory of each entity. If this is not feasible then decisions shall be taken by majority, provided that the dissenting votes do not include two-thirds or more of the members elected from either entity (Dayton Agreement 1995, Annex 4, Art. IV, §3).

In theory these arrangements that guarantee equal powers for the three ethnic groups should have brought the desired balance in the decisionmaking processes. In practice, however, they are misused by the leaders of the three constituent ethnic groups (Divjak and Pugh 2008), who via nationalist rhetoric have the chance to block decisions and impede reforms allegedly for the benefit of their own people (McMahon and Western 2009, Belloni and Strazzari 2014). Thus, political institutions remain blocked and unsuited for the conduct of dialogue on even everyday issues, frequently condemning the country to a detrimental standstill (Gordy 2015).

Except for the political stalemate on the state level, these arrangements have direct consequences on the society exacerbating ethnic grievances and strengthening division along ethnic lines. The Dayton Agreement recognises the three main ethnic groups as constituent peoples, making political representation dependent upon ethnic belonging (Belloni 2009). As a result there are at least two types of citizens who have no opportunity for representation: first, people who belong to a group that is not one of the three constituent ones, for example, Jews or Roma, and, second, people who regard themselves as individual citizens and do not wish to identify themselves ethnically (Gordy 2015). In addition, the presidency and the upper chamber of parliament – the House of People – are only open to Serbs from the Republika Srpska and Bosniaks and Croats from the Federation (Dayton Agreement 1995, Annex 4, Art. IV), excluding, thus, members from the ‘wrong’ entity (Bieber 2010). Consequently, politicians are elected into office as representatives of their respective ethnic groups and have no incentive to make any cross-ethnic appeals (Belloni 2009). Without incentives for cooperation, they can win popularity by defending their national group and by portraying the others as enemies, continue nationalist propaganda and deepen the division of the population.

Furthermore, these arrangements were negotiated and agreed by nationalist leaders, who maintained in peace-time their ruling positions. Through the massively large political structure that was created, comprising numerous parliaments and ministries, nationalists had the chance to accommodate their wartime networks in positions of power. Thus, the same people who conducted the war, who even benefited from it through black market wartime economies, are in the lead of the peace-time BiH. This creates a vicious circle of a leadership that uses chauvinistic rhetoric to preserve their power and a divided population, whose members are reluctant to overcome ethnic segregation due to feelings of insecurity and perceptions of animosity in inter-ethnic relations (Acemoglu and Robinson 2013, Belloni and Strazzari 2014).

This structure not only perpetuates but also legitimises division along ethnic lines, impeding the rapprochement of the population. This is further exacerbated by an educational system that is based on ethnic division. The education system is fragmented and politicised, fostering nationalism and competing perceptions among the Bosnian people (Bozic 2006). Students mostly attend separate schools and in cases where municipalities are more heterogeneous, the phenomenon of ‘two schools under one roof’ ensures that students have little or no contact with those from a different group⁷ (Clark 2010). With the education system being decentralised and governed practically by the entities and the cantons students learn from a mono-ethnic curriculum that not only does not promote understanding or tolerance, but to the contrary breeds suspicion (Swimelar 2013). This ethnic competition serves the fundamental purpose of preserving inter-group tensions, and subsequently, legitimises and preserves ethno-nationalist leadership (Belloni and Strazzari 2014). However, by not ameliorating ethnic rivalries, the country continues to be dangerously divided, a boiling cauldron of twenty-year old suppressed grievances, exacerbated through propaganda and memory as the time goes by.

Corruption and Economic Grievances

The situation turns more dangerous when two further elements, are added, i.e., legitimised corruption and stalled economic growth. Political and economic corruption and stalled economy go hand in hand in BiH, being mutually reinforced and sustained. The arrangements supposed to secure equal representation to all citizens, actually facilitated the plundering of former state-owned companies. The local nationalist elites first nationalised and then privatised state-owned enterprises and infrastructure. They also did so with the blessing of the international officials involved in BiH, who believed that through the privatisation process, wartime networks who occupied a variety of state-owned resources during and after the war would be eliminated (Donais 2005). This way, however, they have underestimated the power of local political elites and their clients, the very people who would dominate the eventual process of post-war privatisation.

In BiH privatisation has helped to create vast opportunities for manipulation and abuse. Even amidst war, the nationalists were already preparing themselves for a new capitalist future, by ensuring that they would be the ones in charge of the process of privatisation (Kurtović 2015). In the post-conflict era this process was characterised by a persistent lack of transparency, where many public assets have been sold off without public bidding or through dubious deals (Slavnić *et al.* 2013). In particular, political parties penetrated and controlled industries and enterprises, whether state-owned or recently privatised (Divjak and Pugh 2008), rewarding their wartime allies with businesses, factories and access to natural resources in their territories of control (Tuathail and Dahlman 2004). Thus, political parties have indirectly managed and guided the process of privatisation

to their advantage by appointing their own people to run those enterprises establishing peace-time local power structures led by war-time leaders (Pugh 2005, TI 2012, Kurtović 2015).

Corruption has created an atmosphere of ambiguity that averts businesses from investing in BiH. Certainty premised on the rule of law is a prerequisite for investment and pervasive corruption has long-term consequences for the country's economic development. Corruption has played a pivotal role in driving foreign investment away; most foreign companies have refused to set up operations after demands by officials to pay bribes and do business exclusively with local party officials (Divjak and Pugh 2008). Corruption is one of the predominant factors that has led to a stalled economy, where unemployment is over 27 per cent, and youth unemployment in particular reaches 62 per cent (WB 2015).

With limited chances for employment in the private sector, citizens turn to the massive public sector to seek for work. However, access to these jobs depends on the ability and willingness to get involved into clientist networks, created and maintained most of the times through family ties and party connections (Kurtović 2015). With the political parties being dominated by ethno-nationalists this creates a further opportunity for the latter to project themselves as the protectors and providers for their constituents (McMahon and Western 2009). Regardless whether citizens actually perceive those politicians as protectors and providers, fact remains that nepotism and corruption are sustained through those practices, largely stemming with their turn from lack of other opportunities of employment.

Those who cannot make it either to the private or the public sector, have no other choice than turn either to state pensions or informal economy for survival (Pugh 2004). Small entitlements, such as veterans' and widows' benefits, pensions and welfare for victims of war, have been providing a safety net (Divjak and Pugh 2008). Informal employment also keeps people above the poverty line. Informal or otherwise called grey or shadow, employment can incorporate both legal and illegal activities, ranging from unregistered employment and tax evasion to smuggling, money laundering and trafficking (Krstić and Sanfey 2007). Although concrete evidence are lacking it is widely believed that informal activities are significantly widespread in BiH. The size of informal economy, in combination with corruption and lack of alternatives makes it difficult to tackle. However, it is also widely accepted that without this grey economy the situation for citizens would likely be worse (Pugh 2004).

Post-war distribution of wealth has created in BiH a new class structure comprising a small and wealthy elite, next to a large pool of unemployed citizens, and an insecure middle class largely employed in the public sector, the remaining privatised and semi-privatised firms, and non-governmental and international organisations (Kurtović 2015).

This has created a new dynamic in Bosnia that was evident in the 2014 riots, which were not triggered by nationalist sentiments, but pivoted around rising

socio-economic inequality. The riots broke out of fatigue and exhaustion of patience towards corruption, low standards of living and lack of perspective for the future. Protesters carried along banners with statements such as 'help us fight corrupt politicians' and 'I am a Serb, a Croat, [and] a Bosniak and I am hungry in all three languages' (Mujkić 2015). In these demonstrations the Bosnian citizens were protesting about the extremely high rates of unemployment, rising poverty, nepotism and the various forms of corruption, condemning the nationalist order that has emerged as a primary mechanism for redistributing wealth and opportunities (Kurtović 2015).

It seems that lack of development and corruption represents as great a threat as ethnic nationalism for the stability of BiH. Corruption, on the one hand, and nationalist political forces, on the other hand, poses the most significant domestic obstacle to the country's development (Donais 2003). Combined with a largely dysfunctional institutional framework, ongoing mutual mistrust and animosity among BiH's various political elites, and the strength of vested interests which benefit from the current status quo of ethnic segregation and wealth's unequal distribution the country finds itself in a complicated situation. On the one hand, segments of the population recognise the need to overcome ethnic division and create a functional, modern state away from ethnicity, being based on market economy and meritocracy. On the other hand however, propaganda and long-standing grievances ensure the absence of lasting engagement and decisiveness to reform BiH into a unified and functional state. Thus, the population remains torn between the grievances of the past and the recognition of the need to reform for the future, not willing, however, and perhaps to a large extent not able, to take necessary steps towards this direction. Citizens remain, nonetheless, frustrated, having put their hopes for change on the European Union accession process, expecting that through the process of meeting the necessary EU benchmarks, the country will be finally able to move forward.

The EU, though, has been for years 'buying' stability in BiH by turning a blind eye to the corrupt political system in return of peace. Corruption was the cost, not only the EU but the international actors in general have been ready to accept in the name of stability, at least in the first post-conflict phase (Zabyelina and Arsovska 2013). Later, with corruption already engrained in the society, governance reforms have been more difficult to implement and thus anti-corruption programmes were postponed until institutions were deemed sufficiently consolidated to withstand scandals and traumas (Belloni and Strazzari 2014).

Representatives of the international community on the ground have proceeded to strategies seeking to tackle corruption. Most of the times, however, those actions were fragmented and not always in line with democratic principles. The High Representative for BiH, for instance, dismissed several political representatives being suspect for corruption (Chandler 2006). However, this tactic brought limited meaningful results. Targeting elected, high-ranking politicians and removing them from office the international mission seemed to

transform BiH into an internationally administrated protectorate (Knaus and Martin 2003). Also targeting specific political figures constituted an erratic naming-and-shaming process that addressed only one aspect of the corruption problem in BiH. Corruption in the country, as also in other south-eastern Europe societies seems to be endemic at the domestic level, rather than systematically organised by the three sets of nationalist leaders (Chandler 2002, Weller and Wolff 2013). Thus, the numerous problems the country faces were not tackled by the fragmented, ticking-the-box actions the international actors apply. On the contrary, issues such as corruption and economic inequalities are perpetuated through the 'OK reporting culture' of the EU (Belloni and Strazzari 2014). The latter, despite acknowledging the lack of transparency keeps pouring money into BiH, knowing at the same time that only a limited amount will reach its legitimate destination, while the rest will end up in the pockets of certain people. Hence, not only anti-corruption strategies fail, but also the EU's credibility as a transformation power in the country is undermined, reducing the Union merely to a funding body that provides economic aid in exchange for peace.

Republika Srpska's Secessionist Claims: A Road to Security Dilemma

Drawing on the attempted constitutional reform of 2006⁸ Milorad Dodik -Republika Srpska's current prime minister, whose party was striving at that time to become the ruling party in RS – began to speculate on an independence referendum for Republika Srpska. He also claimed that BiH is an unsustainable country (Toal 2013) and that RS is the only self-sustainable community in BiH (Barlovac 2012). As a result, Dodik asserted, inevitably a referendum will be held and RS will emerge as an independent country.

Such rhetoric has been continuously repeated over the last ten years. Demands for secession had been exacerbated after Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence, with the RS Assembly to organise an extra-ordinary session to coordinate a response (Toal 2013). Later in 2010 tensions saw a new peak, when RS Assembly adopted a new constitutional law on holding referenda and again in October 2015, when Dodik proclaimed that his party would push for a referendum to be held in 2018 (Bosnia Today 2015, Zuvela 2015). Nevertheless, in early 2016 Dodik succumbed to domestic, regional and wider international pressure and announced that the referendum would be postponed (Kovacevic 2016).

The referendum is highly unlikely to take place in the foreseeable future. Dodik seems to realise that Republika Srpska is not as self-sustainable as he claims it to be (Chivvis 2010). Also he seems to understand that even if RS would proceed to a referendum, it would gain very limited support – if at all – from the international community. The international actors have repeatedly asserted that no change of borders in the Balkans will be accepted or recognised. It is extremely doubtful that even Serbia would recognise Republika Srpska's

independence. Without international recognition and without Serbia's support, RS has no future as independent country (Ker-Lindsay 2016). In the best case scenario it would become an unrecognised entity, internationally isolated and far more impoverished than it is now.

Nonetheless, the limited prospects of success a referendum may have, does not mean that those discussions over its potential conduct do not threaten stability in BiH. The idea of a referendum deeply polarises the Bosnian society. The older generations remember that the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s had started through independence referendums. For non-Serb Bosnians the referendum sounds like the finalisation of the war-time ethnic-cleansing process in BiH (Toal 2013). Therefore, regardless whether the referendum takes place or not, the mere existence of this rhetoric gives rise to insecurity, which fans the flames of ethnic nationalism and severely hampers efforts for reconciliation (Chivvis 2010).

While the mere existence of the referendum prospect is threatening BiH's stability, its actual conduct would possibly be the trigger for war to break out. It is widely accepted that should a referendum take place, BiH will violently collapse (*inter alia*, Chivvis 2010, Toal and Maksić 2011, Lyon 2015, Zuvella 2015). Chivvis (2010) presented various scenarios that could take place after the referendum. One of them is the disintegration of the state army along ethnic lines. This would lead to a security dilemma which would, in turn lead to conflict. He also suggested that the Federation could proceed to pre-emptive strikes against RS, thus, making a war inevitable. In a different scenario, Chivvis suggested that even if the army does not disintegrate, there would be a possible mounting insurgency by Bosniaks within RS that would exacerbate tensions to such a degree that violence will eventually break out. In addition to this, if the international community does not react promptly, this might further increase Bosniak fears. This would intensify national rhetoric that Bosniaks must be prepared to rely on themselves for their protection if they want to avert another tragedy, radicalising, in turn, Bosniak community (Chivvis 2010).

In all likelihood the above scenarios will not happen, because the referendum will probably not occur. Dodik's rhetoric is empty. It aims at bolstering his own position, also perhaps at securing or increasing power for RS or even merely 'winding up' local and international actors in the knowledge that talk of secession solicits a strong response (Ker-Lindsay 2016). Nevertheless, the potential destructive effects this rhetoric may have for the stability of the country should not be dismissed. The perception that the conduct of a referendum is actually a realistic threat is equally dangerous for the country's stability. The mere fact that many observers, both in and outside BiH, believe that secession is a serious possibility is enough to fuel the very tensions that could lead the country down the path of fighting and fragmentation (Ker-Lindsay 2016).

External Factors: A Fragile Neighbourhood

The geographic location of BiH in the Balkans is a double-edged sword for the country. Certainly being located in the European continent, and in close proximity with EU member states, means that the country has the attention of the Union. Nevertheless, fact remains that the Balkans are not free of problems. The status of Kosovo is still unsettled, while the Serbs in Northern Mitrovica (the Serb dominated part of Kosovo) still perceive this region to be part of Serbia. In light of the occasional threats for secession from Republika Srpska, the very fact that Kosovo declared unilateral independence and was subsequently recognised by the majority of EU and NATO countries could have endangered the stability of BiH (Toal and Maksić 2011). Furthermore, Kosovo itself undergoes a phase of severe political crisis, with opposition parties to block parliament functions condemning the country to a deadlock that deteriorates its situation both domestically and internationally (Nushi 2016, Popova and Qafmolla 2016).

In FYROM there is an ongoing political crisis that, along with other matters, extends over ethnic issues between Albanian and Slav Macedonians. Albanian Macedonians, who constitute the one quarter of the population, repeatedly demand greater autonomy within FYROM and the creation of a federation or confederation that would guarantee equality between the two ethnic groups (Marusic 2014, Xharra 2016). In addition the country finds itself in a political crisis since 2014, being constantly shaken by scandals and protests⁹ (EFFDS 2016). Currently, FYROM remains without actual political leadership, while it is not equipped to deal with the flood of refugees from Syria and Iraq straining its borders (Pardew 2016).

The political crises in Kosovo and FYROM might seem like minor Balkan disputes. However, the past has shown that minor Balkan disputes can turn into violent conflicts (Hopkins 2016). Dominoes of destabilisation can be easily diffused in such a region where chains of transnational kindred can be found in nearly all countries. The danger is even greater in countries with such weak institutions as the cases of BiH, Kosovo and FYROM. Hence, the more Kosovo and FYROM get destabilised, the higher the threat for a potential domino of contagion and diffusion of the crises in the region, including BiH.

Stabilising Factors: The EU and Potentially Serbia

The inclusion of Serbia in this section will surely raise some eyebrows as Belgrade has been for years a major destabilising factor for BiH. Serbia has consistently promoted policies that undermined the sovereignty and unity of the country. The renewed agreement of a 'special parallel relationship' in 2006 (Toal 2013), the signing of the agreement on Parliamentary Cooperation between Republika Srpska and Serbia in 2008 (National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia 2008), and the continued bypassing of Sarajevo in favour of Banja Luka in terms of

official meetings are only some examples of such actions (Marciacq 2015). Admittedly, for the most part, this special relation remains symbolic, delivering limited economic benefits to either side. Perhaps the greatest concrete benefit for RS citizens is the special access rights they enjoy in Serbia's health-care and education systems (Bassuener and Weber 2012). Even so, however, such policies fuel Serb nationalism in RS, intensifying and perpetuating divisions within BiH.

Serbia is mentioned in this section in its capacity to play a stabilising role by cooling down Dodik's secessionist claims. Both Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić and Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić declined to support the referendum and openly called on Dodik to shelve the idea (Kovacevic 2016). If RS would still proceed to a secessionist attempt, it is strongly doubted that Serbia would recognise it as an independent state. Serbia has a clear European perspective and will not ruin its accession prospects and become an international pariah again by supporting an attempt that would have no chance of success (Ker-Lindsay 2016). Without Serbia's support, RS will be reluctant to commit to actions that will definitely have devastating effects not only on BiH as a unified state, but on RS and its citizens as well.

Furthermore, Belgrade has shown signs of change of stance over the last years, demonstrating some effort for improvement of relations with Sarajevo (Bassuener and Weber 2012). These efforts include the preparation of joint plans for strengthening of cooperation between the two countries in a number of sectors, comprising predominantly trade strategies, but also agreements on telecommunications, energy and infrastructure, cultural heritage and the search for missing persons (Balkan Insight 2010, BBC 2015). In addition, Serbia's President, Tomislav Nikolić, has apologised for all crimes committed by Serbs during the break-up of Yugoslavia, including Srebrenica (BBC 2013). Nevertheless, despite the apology, Belgrade not only still refuses to recognise the massacre in Srebrenica as genocide, but also persuaded Russia to veto the relevant UN resolution in 2015 (Ker-Lindsay 2016). Srebrenica, thus, as well as the denial of the extent to which Belgrade coordinated and assisted the actions of the Bosnian Serb army during the war in the 1990s, remain major issues that need to be addressed in the process of reconciliation and rapprochement with Sarajevo.

These steps towards improvement in the relations between the two countries largely stem from the EU leverage towards accession on Serbia and BiH alike (Vachudova 2014). Serbia seems committed to continue necessary reforms in order to meet the Union's criteria as envisaged by the 35 Chapters of the *acquis communautaire*. Among the political criteria set by the Union is also the normalisation of relations with neighbouring countries, the adherence to the Dayton agreement and commitment to actions to address the legacies of the Yugoslav wars (European Commission 2016). Progress is to be seen in many of those aspects, strengthening the assumption that perhaps Serbia will be able to constitute a stabilising factor in the future.

The EU remains a pivotal factor of stability in BiH itself, despite the various shortcomings its actions may have. Through the enlargement process and the accession promise, the Union creates incentives for governments to satisfy its numerous entry requirements (Vachudova 2014). Through EU leverage, reforms are introduced in BiH that aim to strengthen among others rule of law, transparency, free market¹⁰ and, hence, increase stability. Moreover, membership, with the economic and geopolitical benefits it brings about, reinforces the reasons for continuations of peace, weakening at the same time the motives for conflict. Admittedly, elites in RS are less enthusiastic towards the European perspective. Even so, however, Dodik recognised that BiH's application to join the EU, submitted in February 2016, was a positive step for the country (Kovacevic and Toe 2016). Not only elites, but also the population mostly sees EU accession positively, hoping that EU accession would improve their quality of life, or even offer them the ticket to leave the country altogether. Thus, albeit for different reasons, each of the parties involved in BiH sees EU membership in a positive way and is willing to comply to an extent with the requirements (Kappler and Richmond 2011).

Along the tangible reinsurances that the Union offers through military presence, technical and institutional support, funding, employment opportunities and reconciliation programmes, the EU also offers a perspective for the future. It is something that the citizens hope that would bring necessary change and will improve its standards of living. From an EU perspective, a crisis in the Balkans would have a direct impact on the EU countries, producing economic and social consequences and generating waves of refugees. Thus, the EU is more vigilant and more willing to get involved and also maintain involvement in the country for the continuation of stability. Although the actions of the EU in the past have not exactly demonstrated pre-emption, decisiveness or effectiveness (Guicherd 1993, Ahrens 2007), it is assumed that, should the country show evidence of descending into a war, the EU will have learned from its mistakes and will act promptly, averting a conflict from occurring.

Thus, the EU is a key stabilising factor in BiH. However, it is an external factor and thus a fragile one as well. The question is what will happen if for any reason the EU can no longer continue its plans in the Balkans, either because of enlargement fatigue, financial austerity or even collapse. Such a change would deprive the country from funding, international military presence and incentives for progress, while it will open the stage for political opportunists that will try to take advantage of the situation to gain power, most likely by extreme nationalist rhetoric. This development reflects a chain of events that according to theories of intra-state conflict would possibly lead to conflict. It seems then that the EU is such a major factor of stability that its withdrawal from the Balkans could constitute a rapid change that could trigger a conflict breaking out.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was not to present scaremongering scenarios for BiH's future. The aim was rather to examine the often cited assumption that BiH is unstable and in danger of collapse. The research found that BiH is not in an immediate danger of collapse. BiH remains peaceful, despite the numerous challenges it faces. However, it comprises an alarming amount of causes of conflict that have been mitigated because both international actors and local elites benefit from the current status quo. Thus, BiH finds itself in a peaceful stalemate, which is likely to continue until a structural change occurs that triggers the outbreak of conflict. BiH is, hence, stable and explosive.

What makes BiH potentially explosive is that in such a loaded environment triggers of conflict may easily appear. Last years' subsequent demonstrations show that the population is getting increasingly frustrated. These protests soon lost momentum and the situation did not escalate. However, in such a tense environment, minor scraps can turn into triggers of violence that if inadequately addressed can escalate into conflict. Not only that, but the country faces from time to time secessionist threats from one of its constituent entities, Republika Srpska. Admittedly, those threats are empty; they cannot materialise. RS will not obtain the necessary international support to pursue such a goal. Nevertheless, the rhetoric itself destabilises the country. It intensifies ethnic tensions in all sides, because people *believe* that secession may be a valid option or threat (depending on the perspective, whether it is an option or a threat). Fuelling nationalism, fear and memories of the past is a dangerous recipe that increases insecurity. When insecurity is increased, security dilemma is not far away. Preventive actions targeting to increase security of one group can have a devastative effect for peace in the country.

Thus, BiH remains peaceful because for the moment no change had taken place that could gain momentum and lead to the outbreak of conflict. In other words, the trigger of conflict has been missing. International actors, Serbia and, perhaps more importantly, the EU have succeeded in mitigating causes of conflict and averting the outbreak of violence. Also various local elites in BiH benefit politically and economically from this situation. It guarantees that they remain in power, and that they continue to have access to funding schemes and economic assets. Although this is not the best case scenario for the EU, it still helps maintain peace in the country. Hence, for as long as elites and EU sustain the status quo, instability without conflict is likely to continue.

However, the significance of the EU as a stabilising factor generates other questions concerning the sustainability of BiH. For instance, how will local actors react when the EU will try to change the status quo in order to proceed with the accession process and how will this reaction affect security in the country. Another question would be how the citizens of BiH would react if the accession process is terminated and the EU dream evaporates. An even more detrimental

event would be the international actors to leave BiH altogether. Should the above occur, the country will in all likelihood collapse. Such a development would be a rapid structural change of such magnitude that would probably serve as trigger for conflict to break out. Certainly this is an exaggerated scenario. The EU has not spent billions to maintain stability in the Balkans only to leave and abandon those countries in their fate. Yet, future is uncertain, and fact remains that twenty years after the end of the Yugoslav wars BiH is still in a dire situation.

In conclusion, this paper found that BiH is unstably peaceful. The country comprises a significant number of causes that could lead to conflict: the population is ethnically divided, while this division is loaded with political and economic grievances that are exacerbated through low standards of living, corrupt institutions and propaganda. Secessionist demands fuel past traumas, also augmenting ethnic grievances. In addition, the country finds itself in an unstable neighbourhood, with other countries in the region facing similar problems. These reasons, though, are underlying causes of conflict; they can exist in the country for years without a conflict to break out. As long as there is no trigger of conflict, these reasons can be mitigated and a violent collapse can be averted.

Notes

1. In 2012, citizens of Banja Luka protested against the destruction of the Picin Park and the construction of a shopping mall in its place. The 'baby revolution' kicked off when a three months old baby died because the Bosnian government was unable to issue the necessary documents for her to travel to Serbia to get life-saving medical treatment. Finally in February 2014, demonstrations started in Tuzla, triggered by the failed privatisation and the closing down of four former-state owned enterprises, leaving hundreds of workers unemployed (Dedovic 2013, Kurtović 2015, Ralchev 2015).
2. It is acknowledged that the representation of the case study inevitably will entail a degree of subjectivity according to the author's understanding and interpretation of events.
3. For definitions of failed states: Rotberg (2003), Milliken and Krause (2002), Zartman (1995), Krasner (2004), Wolff (2011).
4. Admittedly, scholars such as Mason *et al.* (2011) and Walter (2004) examine civil war recurrence using a broader time frame. However, they conduct a binary analysis of civil war recurrence without incorporating nuances in the causes of conflict. Walter (2004) for example tests whether the same sets of groups slip back to conflict without taking into consideration other potential differences between the two wars. Mason *et al.* (2011) adopt an even broader approach testing only civil war recurrence within the same country, without being concerned with the recurrence or non-recurrence of a particular conflict dyad. Although their research is most valuable in the wider context of ethnic conflict, it is not particularly useful in the frame of this research that seeks to investigate whether and which causes of conflict can be found in BiH and to what extent they threaten peace.

5. Diffusion refers to the spill over of conflict from one region to another, while contagion refers to the process in which one group's actions provide inspiration and guidance for other groups elsewhere (Gurr 1993, Yilmaz 2007).
6. It is acknowledged that Kosovo is not a fully fledged state as it remains unrecognised by Serbia and another 84 UN member states. However, it is de facto separated from Serbia and has its own functional environment, whose destabilisation can have a spill over in the region.
7. A supreme court in BiH ruled in 2014 that the segregation of schoolchildren based on ethnic background is illegal. Nevertheless, the system of separation continues to take place. I thank Stefanie Kappler for pointing this out.
8. A package of amendments to the Dayton Constitution was brought into BiH parliament in April 2006. It would have been the first phase of a constitutional reform that aimed to strengthen the functions of the central state. This fuelled nationalist rhetoric in RS with its leaders claiming that the plan aimed to revoke the autonomy the entities and the RS in particular enjoyed. The proposed amendments failed to meet the necessary two-thirds majority requirement for constitutional amendments by two votes.
9. Shortly after the parliamentary elections of 2014 the opposition not accepting the result of the elections released wiretapped material accusing the government on several matters. Those matters, included electoral fraud, abuse of the legal system and the illegal surveillance of citizens. The situation escalated further when audio tapes were published in which the Prime Minister Gruevski, along with the interior affairs minister and other governmental officials were heard discussing how to conceal the killing of a man during protests in 2011. These publications were followed by massive demonstrations in Skopje. Allegedly in an attempt to overcome the political crisis President Ivanov abruptly pardoned all politicians facing crime investigations, including investigation on wire-tapping allegations. This fuelled the situation in the country even further resulting in a new round of protests. In addition, the elections of 2016 had been constantly postponed due to the political crisis, being conducted eventually in December, instead of April as was originally planned. December elections, though, resulted again in a deadlock as no party managed to win a clear majority, perpetuating the crisis.
10. For a detailed overview of the thirty-five accession chapters: European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Chapter of the Acquis, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/policy/conditions-membership/chapters-of-the-acquis/index_en.htm.

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